

Personal guides

The advice contained in this section won't change the world, but it can help you improve your life by helping you not get messed around by debt collectors, social services or the police.

These ideas could also be used to organise around in community or workplace campaigns. Why not print them out, put them in a local newsletter or email them to friends?

Office worker's survival guide



The modern office is fraught with dangers. From the risk of getting fired, to stress, repetitive strain injury (RSI), mindnumbing boredom and more. This helpful guide from libcom.org will help you navigate these hazards to a happy [work life](#), and perhaps a slightly better world...

Of course not all of the tips will be appropriate in every setting so pick and choose the right ones for you, depending on how safe your job is how much you care about it.

Appearance

A vitally important aspect of office life is how you come across to management and colleagues. If you want the kudos of being a hard worker, without all the bothersome hard work, then you need to look the part:

- o Always look busy.
- o Keep your desk covered in piles of paperwork.
- o Don't say yes to meeting invitations right away, always check your diary first (even if you know you don't have anything in it) and frequently say you can't make certain times, and suggest others instead.
- o Have loads of programme windows open on your computer. This helps mask your web browser windows!
- o Often have your voicemail box be full. Fill it with messages yourself if necessary.



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Wherever you go, take files with you. If you walk briskly with files, you can go chat to colleagues, go for a walk, etc but it will look like you are going to do something important.

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Instead of actually working late, just leave your monitor on and leave a cardigan

on the back of your office chair to make it look like you are still at the office when actually you're already at home with your feet up watching Gossip Girl. You could even leave a half empty cup of tea/coffee on occasion, and maybe even a half eaten bourbon biscuit (or other crappy biscuit, you wouldn't want to waste a good one).

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Eat lunch at your desk - but after actually taking your full lunch break off. Thus maximising your free time and looking like a dedicated employee.

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Help out workmates with little jobs. It makes you look helpful, and can make you popular, while not causing too much stress, and it makes life easier for them. And of course it makes others more likely to help you out when you're overloaded or don't know how to do something.

Taking it easy

Stress kills. Not only that, but working too fast is antisocial behaviour. If that sounds odd, let me explain: slow work means that more workers are needed. More workers means lower unemployment. Low unemployment means greater demand for labour, which puts an upward pressure on wages. So working fast means higher unemployment and lower wages. It also singles out those unable to work quickly enough, such as some disabled or elderly staff, putting them at risk of dismissal. Don't do it!

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Take the breaks you are entitled to. Look at your legal rights in your country, and your employer's procedures and practices. Encourage colleagues to do the same so individuals can't be singled out.

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Take additional breaks wherever you can. Many office-based workplaces will have health and safety policies recommending 5 to 10 min breaks every hour to help prevent RSI/eyestrain etc. Take them! You can also sneak breaks by smoking, or better for your health go out and chat with smoker colleagues on

their breaks: after all, it wouldn't be fair if non-smokers weren't allowed similar breaks.

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If you figure out a way to make your work quicker, or make the process more efficient, don't tell your boss! They may just give you extra work or worse reduce your hours or make staff redundant. Keep your innovation to yourself and use your additional time to do things you want to do, like write your novel or send personal emails. You could always offer to take on a little bit more work, to make yourself look efficient without giving away how much free time you really have.

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If in your job you get the chance to work from home, try to get the work done in advance but don't give it to the boss. Then when you're at home sit around in your dressing gown eating Doritos and masturbating, and every couple of hours just send in a bit of work you had already completed.

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Informally with workmates try to establish a rate of work which you are all happy with and which isn't too fast, and don't let management know what you're doing! If a new member of staff starts make sure you induct them into how you do things.

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Take sickies when you need them. If you can find out what the average sickness absences at your workplace, make sure you get at least the average. Aside from giving

you a break, it can help prevent discrimination against any disabled workers who have to take time off. If colleagues get annoyed about people being off sick, encourage them to take time off as well to level the playing field.

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Volunteer to do jobs which take you out of the office. Not only does this make

you look helpful, but it can give you the opportunity to go to a cafe, go around the shops, sit in a park, etc.

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If you suffer from mental health problems or another disability and you are overworked, your employer may be required to make adjustments for you, which could include reducing your workload. Get advice on this from a trade union, or advocacy organisation in your area.

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If you and your colleagues are all overloaded, meet together and try to collectively agree a way to challenge it. You can have a look at our workplace organising section for suggestions on how to do this.

Making the most of your pay

As wage slaves, the money is why we turn up each day. Obviously, the more of it for the least work the better for workers, although of course the opposite is true for our employers (here lies the central contradiction of capitalism). So they are always coming up with ways to try to get us to do more work for less. Here are some ways of turning the tables...

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Eat breakfast at work. Why get up earlier and eat at home, when you could be getting paid to have breakfast?! (Depending on your workplace there may also be free coffee and milk)

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Steal as much as humanly possible. Work steals our whole lives, so never feel bad about this, as we could never steal back everything which is taken from us. From time (doing what we want to do, rather than what the boss wants us to do) to stationery, to tea and coffee to computer equipment and beyond - get everything you can making sure you don't get caught.

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If management don't always see when you get in or when you leave, arrange with your workmates to take it in turns to get in late and leave early. If you use time cards, punch each other in.

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Try not to work any unpaid overtime, and encourage colleagues to do the same so

"troublemakers" can't be victimised.

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Go to the toilet in work time when possible. Don't go in your lunch break, as you probably won't be getting paid for it. And you'll save money on toilet paper.

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Make the most of your work printers and photocopiers. Print out your personal photos, long texts you've downloaded and would like to read, photocopy revolutionary pamphlets, leaflets, posters and anything else you can think of.

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Take a look at our sabotage section which is full of accounts of workers slacking off on the job and getting the most out of their employers.

Not getting fired

Some jobs are more secure than others. Your risk of getting fired also varies greatly depending on the country you live in and your employment status (agency, permanent, etc).

So here are some general tips to make it less likely as whatever your situation:



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Try to make yourself indispensable. Try to either get or hold onto some important responsibilities. If you are the only one who knows how to do something, guard this knowledge closely. Keep shortcuts you know for doing things quickly to yourself.

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Know your rights. Read up on your employment rights in your area and for your type of contract, and your employer's procedures. The more you know the better position you will be in to protect yourself from dismissal.

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Join a union. If there is a recognised union at your workplace, you should join it as an insurance policy. Look into their track record first to see if it is worthwhile. If there isn't a recognised union depending on where you are you could join a general union which might be able to represent you if you got in trouble.

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Get to know your employer's code of conduct and acceptable behaviour, so you know what lines not cross.

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Hide the fact you're a slacker!

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The best defence against redundancy or disciplinary firing is the solidarity of your workmates. If you can get your co-workers to stick together and take action to defend each other this is the most effective way of stopping dismissals. See our workplace organising guide for suggestions on how to do this, or our workplace activity section to read the organising experiences of others.

The internet

The internet can be a bit of a minefield at work. On the one hand it offers more opportunities for rewarding shirking than ever before (I have often wondered what office workers did in the days before the net, just stare at their

typewriters?). On the other hand, it is easy for employers to monitor and can get you fired. In general you could take your cues from other colleagues, especially more long serving staff. If you know that lots of people surf the web all the time, and no one has ever been disciplined then maybe you can relax. But you should be aware that employers can easily track all internet and e-mail use, and can discipline or dismiss workers easily for personal use of them. These tips are based on it being better safe than sorry:

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If you are someone who management doesn't like, or if your employer is going to be making redundancies, it can be advisable to be on best behaviour with respect to internet use, because some employers can use workers' web use to sack people they don't like, or to make redundancies on the cheap. Pointing out others being worse than you won't help you.

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Steer clear of any indecent/profane material. This can definitely get you sacked, and many employers use software which automatically looks for swear words on your screen or in e-mails, so stay away from it.

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If you have a smart phone or tablet computer with mobile internet you can either legitimately or sneakily use, that would be a safer way of browsing without your boss being able to track it.

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If you are going to browse the net at work, be aware of who can see your screen. You can even put a mirror on your desk (or leave mirrored sunglasses) to watch for your boss coming with your fingers ready on the alt and tab keys!

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To be safest of all, you could just copy and paste websites you want to read into Word documents, then either bring them to work on a USB stick to read them, or upload



them to your personal e-mail account's drafts folder and download them from there, but don't save them to your work computer. You can also do other personal projects like this, such as work on your own blog or help format articles for our library. Better still, write your own account of your working life or your one woman/man workplace rebellion and post it up on libcom!

So, anyone got any more suggestions? Any missing categories? What are your top tips?

Images from the Comedy Central TV show, Workaholics **Beating the bailiffs guide**

Getting overloaded with debt and don't know what to do? This articles contains useful advice, tips and contacts for dealing with debt and bailiffs.

Overloaded with debt? Bailiffs threatening you?

Some useful advice from WAG...

Firstly, get advice from your local Citizen's Advice Bureau. They are busy, but very helpful.

Bailiffs firms and the police break the law if they think that they can get away with it.

Knowing your rights, and making sure that the Council and Bailiffs have followed legal procedures, should buy you some more time.

Several key things to take note of:

Your possessions can't be seized unless you've been sent a written notice by the

Authority at least 14 days before any visit. This must have details of any fees they have added on.

The police have no power to force entry on behalf of the bailiffs or local authority, unless there is a breach of the peace.

Lock all windows and doors. Bailiffs have no powers to force entry by breaking open an outer door, which is locked or bolted.

If the bailiffs do get in, offer what you can afford to pay, not what they want you to pay.

Ask them to drop the costs they have added.

Bailiffs can only take things that belong to you the debtor. If you have a receipt proving that an item belongs to someone else, they cannot take it.

Bailiffs cannot have you put in prison. If they never get in and you do not pay they will return your case to the court. The magistrate will then look at what you can afford to pay.

If you're still stuck and would like some help with taking on the bailiffs by whatever means are necessary, you could do better than get in touch with your local libertarian group (see our listings or ask in our forums for details) or ask your friends and neighbours to help you out.

Walthamstow Anarchist Group also have more information about your rights against the bailiffs - see their website below.



If you are struggling with debt, both the Consumer Credit Counselling Service (0800 138

1111) and National Debtline (0808 808 4000) offer free information and advice.

Written by the Walthamstow Anarchist Group Edited by libcom, last reviewed 2006

Dealing with accusations of benefit fraud

guide

Some tips and advice for any claimants who are facing accusations of benefit fraud.

The Government spends hundreds of thousands of pounds talking about this but actually has little success prosecuting alleged fraudsters. It is important to remember that receiving benefits you are not entitled to does not automatically make you guilty.

Overpayments of benefits can be caused through official error and claimant error and may not actually be classifiable as fraudulent.

If you are accused of fraud by benefit agency staff don't pay any attention to their attitude, much of which may be bluff, as in the case of bailiffs.

Remember, you are allowed to agree or disagree with statements they ask you to sign and there should be no coercion on their part what-so-ever.

If you are found guilty you should always appeal.

Bear in mind that benefit underclaiming is much more widespread than fraud so never, ever, let them make you feel guilty and admit to anything.

Written by the Walthamstow Anarchist Group **Dealing with credit card debt guide**



A short guide to help you deal with credit card debt, as consumer debt in the UK continues to spiral.

Cut it up!

You don't need to work for the Financial Times to realise that credit card debt is getting well out of hand. Ten years ago hardly anyone had one. Now there are 91 million credit and debit cards in the UK. Two fifths of our shopping is now put on the plastic. The net result is a large portion of the population with massive credit card debt. Given the extortionate interest rates charged this is seriously bad news for us and the source of gleeful hand rubbing for the high street bankers (what's that rhyming slang for I wonder?) who are pocketing it.

We see it like this. Credit cards have been introduced not to make our lives easier, but to extract money from us. Credit card debt acts like a mini mortgage – got to keep our noses to the grindstone so as not to miss any payments. We lived without them for years, and can start doing so again. To help you on your way to liberating yourself from plastic purgatory we have our “Cut it up” campaign. The first step in taking part is as easy as you make it. Get your credit card and take a pair of scissors to it. This may seem hard at first, but believe me, the feeling of relief when its done is immense. Worried about the debt you've accrued? The most important thing is not to panic. There's plenty of free advice you can get out there, and things really might not be as bad as you think. For starters, did you know the following?

Credit Card debt is classified as “non-priority” debt. You can't be imprisoned for not paying non-priority debts and you are unlikely to lose your home or your essential goods.

It is an offence under The Administration of Justice Act 1970 (amongst others)

for someone in debt to be harassed by their creditor such as a credit card company or an agent acting on their behalf.

Debts of under £5000 can only be heard at the small claims court. So even if you do get taken to court you can't be stung with solicitors costs if you lose.

Debt collectors are not the same as bailiffs. Debt collectors cannot take any action against you, apart from asking you to pay any money owed.

Regardless of what they say, you don't have to let bailiffs in. They are not allowed to force their way into your home unless you have let them in on a previous visit, hence the importance of never, ever letting them in. *Read more about how dealing with bailiffs* We don't claim to be legal experts. We certainly don't claim to offer "impartial" advice either

– we despise bailiffs, bankers and other creditors as much as anyone and support fair means or foul to get the better of them! Some decent, free, practical advice is available from The National debtline on 0808 808 4000. Their website is www.nationaldebtline.co.uk Alternatively, you could visit a local Citizens Advice Bureau.

Written by the Walthamstow Anarchist Group



Dealing with street harassment guide

A guide for women with advice on how to effectively deal with sexual harassment in public.

Harassment is: Any number of acts or comments which make you feel physically or sexually unsafe or uncomfortable. They can be made by people you have known for years or by perfect strangers.

Basic Advice

If you are the victim of harassment, take the following steps: **Be safe**

Safety is a priority. If you are in a situation in which you feel unsafe at all, remove yourself from it as quickly as possible. Do not put yourself in unnecessary danger for the sake of making a principled stand.

However, if you do feel safe enough to respond to your harasser, do the following: **1. Name the behaviour**

For example, "Don't slap my arse. That's harassment" or "Don't make suggestive remarks to me. That's harassment" or "Don't talk about my body. That's harassment" or "Don't stare at me. That's harassment". You can also simply say in a strong voice, "Don't sexually harass women" or "Stop! That's sexual harassment."

2. Name the perpetrator

"You, the man in the blue pinstriped suit, get your hand off my breast" or "You, the driver of the blue Polo, don't stare at my breasts"

3. Use strong body language

Look the harasser in the eye and speak in a strong, clear voice. Be confident in what you say and do.

4. Do not apologise or ask a question

For instance, don't say "Excuse me...", "Would you...", "Do you realise...", "I'm sorry, but...",

"Please..." etc



5. Do not get into a dialogue with the harasser Do not answer any of the harassers questions. Simply repeat your statement or leave.

So, for example,

What you should *not* do:

You say, "Don't shout 'Nice tits' at me or any other woman. That's harassment".

He says, "Jeez, can't you take a compliment?"

Don't say, "Yes, I can take a compliment, but that's not a compliment. That's harassment."

He will then counter with something like, "Well, you're crazy if you take it that way. I meant it as a compliment."

This allows him to justify his behaviour to you, himself and anyone else standing around.

What you should do:

When he says, "Jeez, can't you take a compliment?" either leave the situation, having made your point, or repeat your statement. If he continues to try to engage you in a dialogue, either leave or keep repeating your statement.

6. Do not swear or lose your temper

For many harassers, the goal is to get a rise out of you, which is why they participate in this kind of behaviour. For them to see you getting angry or upset just encourages them to continue to harass both you and other people.

In addition, if a passer-by hears you shout out, "You f***ing arsehole!" when they have seen or heard nothing the harasser has done, they will tend to think you are the harasser. This, again, benefits the harasser, who can put on a "Can you believe this woman?" look. If you remain calm, it will be clear that you are the person being harassed and the perpetrator is in the wrong. It will also take away the reward (upsetting you) for their action.

Taken from Anti-Street Harassment UK, edited by libcom **Gardening and food-growing guide**

Personal advice and tips on growing your own fruit and vegetables to stay healthy and save money.

We all know the advantages of organically produced food, but why should we have to spend a fortune on organic fruit and veg? It is often from miles away, over packed, expensive, a bit manky by the time we get it and in some areas only available from supermarkets.

Another option for some people can be to grow it yourself. Producing your own food is a top buzz! It saves money (especially if you are growing more expensive or rarer varieties), keeps you fit, reduces food miles to food inches, tastes better, teaches you lots, and is a whole lot easier than people think.

Professional gardeners and gardening books have done a lot to portray food growing as something which only an experienced producer with a hundred acres, and tons of machinery and biocides, should even consider taking on. Small time growers are often poo-pooed and people with no access to land often give up before they've started.

But there is so much that can be produced with minimum space: mushrooms in the airing cupboard or on an old compost heap, endless summer salads from just six or seven square feet, pots of jam from just one mature currant bush, sprouted seeds from anywhere you can fit a jam jar and huge tomatoes in the cab of a parked up truck.

Try not to get disheartened by lack of space. It is quite incredible the yields that can be obtained from the tiniest plot, or even urban balcony.

There are many opportunities to get access to land. If you live in a town, you should be able to get an allotment. These are wonderful places to meet other gardeners, swap plants and pick up tips. These green oases are under constant threat from developers, so having an allotment is one of the best ways of protecting their survival.

Another option is to use other people's land. Ask to use a neighbour's abandoned garden, advertise for one, or even squat!

WWOOF (Willing Workers On Organic Farms) is an excellent scheme that places people who want to garden or farm organically, both nationally and internationally, on fix-it-yourself placements. Placements can last from two days to years, usually for bed and board. A brilliant way to travel and grow.

There are several books. 'The Permaculture Plot - a guide to Permaculture in Britain', and

'The Organic Directory - your guide to buying natural foods' which lists organic farms and small holdings that take working visitors. Similarly 'Diggers and Dreamers - a guide to Communal Living' lists intentional communities of varying type, who may take visitors.

Although these options are nowhere near as the same as having your own garden they can offer experience, contacts and a chance to get started. So even if you haven't got a garden. Go on get growing! Grow some of your own healthy chemical-free food, even collect your own seed. Try it, it's not hard!

WWOOF tel: 01273 476 286

National Society of Allotment Growers tel. 0153666576

Permaculture Association tel: 01654 712 188

Henry Doubleday Research Association tel 01203 303 517

Soil Association tel: 0117 929 0661

The Permaculture Plot - a guide to Permaculture in Britain ISBN 1 85623 0104

Diggers and Dreamers - a guide to Communal Living ISBN 0 951494546

Organic Directory - your guide to natural foods ISBN 1 900322 03

Taken and edited by libcom from Schnews